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SUBJECT: WEST AFRICA COAST INITIATIVE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE IN
FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE

REF: 10 FREETOWN 61; KOUTSIS-CHESHES E-MAIL DATED 2/10/10

[11](#). (U) SUMMARY: The UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) sponsored a round of meetings February 17-19 designed to assist participant countries (Guinea-Bissau, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone) with the implementation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Regional Action Plan on Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime and Drug Abuse. The result was the West Africa Coast Initiative (WACI) Freetown Commitment on Combating Illicit Trafficking of Drugs and Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa. Participants complained that neither ECOWAS nor UNODC were providing funding to implement the action plan. Despite hours of discussion on minutiae of language and substantial disagreement on how legalistic and specific the commitment should be, the final document was ratified by all four participating countries. The real value added was the offline discussion and opportunity for these four neighbor states to meet and discuss real-world cross border coordination on the ground. END SUMMARY.

WACI CONFERENCE

[12](#). (U) From February 17 to 19, representatives from the four West African nations of Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea-Bissau, and Cote d'Ivoire met in Freetown to finalize the West Africa Coast Initiative (WACI) Commitment On Combating Illicit Trafficking of Drugs And Transnational Organized Crime In West Africa, in support of the implementation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Regional Action Plan To Address The Growing Problem Of Illicit Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime And Drug Abuse In West Africa 2008 - 2011.

[13](#). (U) The round of meetings was hosted by the UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and chaired by Brig. (ret) Kellie Conteh, head of the Sierra Leonean Office of National Security. Also in attendance were a host of international organizations (ECOWAS, various UN offices, the European Union, Interpol) and the diplomatic corps (U.S., China, France, the UK, Spain). The U.S. had the largest diplomatic delegation, led by the Charge d'Affaires to Sierra Leone, and included the regional security officer for Sierra Leone, the FBI Legatt in Sierra Leone, the Civilian Police and Judicial Affairs Officer from Monrovia, Liberia, and a counternarcotics program officer from the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM).

LIBERIA BEGINS IMPLEMENTATION OF WACI

14. (U) The Liberian delegation was headed by the Director/Inspector General of Police Marc Amblard, and included the Commissioner of Customs and Excise Decontee T. King-Sackie, the newly appointed head of the Liberia National Police (LNP) Transnational Crime Unit (TCU) Wallas Dennis, and newly appointed head of the LNP Police Support Unit (PSU) John Kemoh. The Liberian delegation quickly engaged in the days' discussions.

15. (U) UNODC representatives stated their eagerness to work with Liberia on implementing their transnational crime unit or "TCU," the concept being that the TCU will be an interagency task force against all transnational crime, not just drug trafficking. UNODC stated in their presentation of TCU assessment results that they were impressed by the proactive nature of Director/IGP Amblard who was developing his own plan for a TCU at the time of the assessment visit to Liberia and has since built upon it.

16. (U) The first day's presentation of the joint assessment results of the four countries, designed to evaluate TCU compatibility, showed that the four are very similar with regard to transnational crime interdiction: political will and knowledge of the WACI is present at the highest levels but lacking within mid- and lower

MONROVIA 00000254 002 OF 003

management; resources and training for law enforcement practitioners are insufficient; salary levels are low; national information sharing capabilities are poor to nonexistent.

ASSESSMENT HIGHLIGHTS

17. (U) All four countries were lauded for being committed to ongoing reform within their security agencies, a must for TCU success. Sierra Leone is well advanced in its ability to combat drug crime with the development of the Joint Drug Interdiction Task Force that will hopefully be expanded into a full blown TCU. The assessment team praised Liberia's embryonic TCU and training support for its new director. For Cote d'Ivoire, two major agencies, the Gendarmerie and the National Police, are well set up to deal with transnational crime; and Guinea-Bissau is in the midst of developing a new security framework with the development of a TCU in mind.

A NOTE ABOUT CORRUPTION

18. (U) Presenters made clear that the TCU will be a target for corruption, especially as it develops into an effective deterrent, and that paying a good salary and incentives for TCU agents will be needed. UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) Senior Police Advisor Rudy Landeros commented that even in the best-paid law enforcement agencies in the U.S. corruption still exists, that we have to acknowledge that it will happen, and instead focus on enhancing the capacity of professional standards and internal affairs within the separate agencies and the TCU to make examples of those who fall prey to temptation.

YES, WE HAVE NO MONEY

¶9. (U) On day two, reality set in as participants learned that neither ECOWAS nor UNODC has any funding available to help set up TCUs or for any other action supporting the WACI commitment. Liberia's Director/IGP pushed back on language included in the first draft of the WACI that called for legal reform, arguing that such legislative changes are not within the power of those present, and how it was a lot to ask of the representative nations that they pursue such far sweeping changes without any financial support. This started a spirited discussion about timeframe and lack of funding - three years projected for TCUs to get up and running, according to the joint assessment work plans - and how that will simply give the organized crime groups the time they need to dig in. UNODC representatives responded that donors will be more likely to support their action plans if UNODC can show that all the countries have documented their commitments.

YOU SAY "TUH-MAY-TOE" I SAY "TOH-MAH-TOH"

¶10. (U) Most of day two was taken up with discussions about pronunciation and syntax. French and Portuguese translations of "West Africa Coast Initiative" and the gender of their respective acronyms were raised, as well as whether it should be referred to as "the wacky" or "the wassy" commitment, with many of those on the sidelines preferring the former as a good descriptor for the amount of time spent pursuing the issue. Further, the question of whether the term "prosecution" or "trial" should be used to describe court proceedings needed much time to be resolved. Even on the last day, one VIP not present for the full conference raised concerns with

MONROVIA 00000254 003 OF 003

the French translation of the final document and was answered with befuddled looks and audible sighs from the attendees.

¶11. (U) Ultimately, a final commitment document was produced, incorporating all the agreed changes and signed by the four country representatives. The document contained both more general language keeping to the spirit of support for combating drug trafficking and other transnational crimes, and more specific assurances of implementing laws on money laundering, strengthening legal procedures, and establishing TCUs and Financial Intelligence Units (FIU).

¶12. (SBU) COMMENT: The implementation of the WACI principles and establishment of the TCU in Liberia is an important step in creating a modern LNP that can cooperate effectively with its neighbors on transnational crime. We feel strongly that under the current leadership the LNP has started down the path to success. However, it is clear that the LNP lags far behind its neighbors in its law enforcement architecture, and continued focus on developing police capacity is necessary before any real cross-border cooperation can begin. END COMMENT.

¶13. (U) This cable has been cleared by Embassy Freetown.
THOMAS-GREENFIELD